



The Expo Foundation

Migrants between Culture and Society

A case study of a changing social climate after the murder of Fadime Sahindal

“Fadime - a martyr of our time”

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Executive summary

On 21 January 2002, 26-year-old Fadime Sahindal was shot to death by her father in her sister's flat in Uppsala, north from Stockholm. The family is of Kurdish origin and came as refugees to Sweden from Turkey. This murder has had a great impact on Swedish society as a whole. The murder became one of the largest media stories of the year with an intensive coverage in television and other media. For two weeks it was the single leading story, eclipsing news about the war in Afghanistan and other large topics. The Fadime Sahindal murder has touched the whole Swedish nation. She has become a »martyr of our time«.

The murder has also had great impact on the Swedish authorities' work regarding subjected girls of migrant origin. Activities to protect and support migrant girls subjected to violence and threats in their families have become an issue of high priority among authorities and NGO's alike.

The aim of this report is to illuminate the major activities and increased focus on subject girls of migrant origin that have emerged after this murder. It is also an effort to analyse whether this murder has changed the climate of debate in Sweden. In a way, the debate may have become more open, regarding several aspects of integration and migration. The attention of the murder of Fadime Sahindal may be one reason, as well as other events of major importance such as the attacks on World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001. This development has both advantages and disadvantages, which are brought up in the discussion of the report.

This case study will discuss the main aspects of the activities and approaches made in Sweden since the murder in the end of January 2002. First, the Fadime Sahindal case will be given an introduction, as well as other murders with a similar »honour« relation. The murder of Fadime Sahindal is the third known case in Sweden of a so called »honour killing«. In 1999 another Kurdish girl living in Sweden, Pela Atroshi, was murdered by male relatives in the Iraqi part of Kurdistan. And in 1996 a 15 year old girl, Sara, was strangled to death by her brother and her cousin. The real debate on migrant girls' subjection, however, did not start until the murder of Pela Atroshi became known to the public, almost a year after she died. Following Fadime Sahindal's death the focus on such violence have dramatically increased to become one of the major topics discussed in Swedish media.

Also the report will deal with activities regarding the Swedish Government, which has appointed an expertise group commissioned to look into the situation of subject girls of migrant origin and come up with suggestions on measures on how to counteract such subjection. The group will also focus on migrant men and boys.

The majority of the activities among the NGOs that are presented in this report are aiming at women and girls. There are a few women shelters that are mainly working with migrant women and girls, which have received a great amount of attention in media. They have also to a certain extent participated in the public debate in media and in manifestations in memory of Fadime Sahindal and other victims of »honour killings«. This attention has resulted in an increase of telephone calls made to the women shelters and emergency hot lines from subject migrant women and girls.

The report will also present examples of other organisations established as may be seen as a direct response to the murder in Uppsala. There will also be a presentation of the migrant

organisations' engagement in issues regarding migrant girls who are subject to violence in their homes. One of the major organisations with this issue is the Swedish Save the Children Fund. In their work they are aiming at both the subjected girls, but also the men and boys in migrant families. They are collaborating with several migrant organisations that are representing migrants from the Middle East in particular.

Apart from examining the work of the Swedish authorities and NGOs, a part in the report will deal with the very recent debate that emerged among the mainstream political parties regarding integration and migration issues and whether this may be related to the debate on integration and migration issues that occurred after the murder of Fadime Sahindal.

Also the ongoing activities of the xenophobic parties have been examined to see whether their articles may relate to the debate in society as a whole regarding migrants and violence in migrant families. The ongoing debate has affected the xenophobic parties' activities since they use contributions from participants in the debate in media for their own purposes. The question is however to what extent they affect the society.

Violence in families and against women has been in focus in media and among authorities for quite some time. However violence against women and girls has become more noticed during recent years. It may also be of a more delicate matter, in particular from the Swedish authorities' part, when it occurs in migrant families, as there may be difficult to both counteract and explain this violence without pinpointing certain ethnic groups in society.

The Fadime Sahindal murder and similar murders on migrant girls have led to the use of new concepts in order to define this crime and the group of girls subjected to this kind of violence. The authorities have chosen to call this group »subject girls living in patriarchal families«. One may also say that a new category of murder has emerged, namely the »honour killing«. Many do not want to use this term but it has caught on and become of common use.

Participants in the public debate have presented several explanations to the occurrence of »honour killings«. The main question have focused on whether this kind of murder category can be explained as »culturally specific« or not. Many participants in the debate, both men and women, and of all kinds of origin, have participated and contributed with their views in the debate.

Media has a powerful position in society; in a way media is setting the agenda for society as a whole. Their focus on the Fadime Sahindal murder and to similar murders may also be an underlying factor for the authorities in their work. Media also has a great influence in forming public opinion since it determines how a specific issue is described. Media also chooses the participants in the debate.

This report will focus on both »good« and »bad« impact that the Fadime Sahindal murder has had on society as a whole. The focus of subject girls of migrant origin may have made them more visible in society, which leads to better measures to counteract this kind of subjection and hopefully better integration policies for migrants in society.

In addition, this case study will illuminate how the focus on the Fadime Sahindal murder may have affected the public opinion and view of the migrants living in Sweden. One effect may be society's, mainly politicians and participants in the debate, increased demands on their responsibilities. The talk of improved integration, mainly concerning migrants' better

knowledge on what values that are prevailing in the Swedish society, has been increased after the murder of Fadime Sahindal. This has been expressed in, for instance, increased demands on the introduction of »tests«, mostly regarding language skills but also regarding values, as a prerequisite to become a Swedish citizen. Similar suggestions on increased demands on the migrant population have also emerged in the major political parties' campaigns for the September 2002 election.

In the end a few recommendations will be presented. They are mainly regarding media's responsibility in illuminating cases like these and what measures to use to broaden the picture.

It has to be emphasised that the aim of this report is not to explain the underlying causes for the murder of Fadime Sahindal, but it is rather to describe the course of event regarding the public debate. This event has had great effects on Swedish society and this report is an effort to illuminate this.

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1. Introduction

First and last, it is perhaps a valid point to inform the reader that the author of this case study is a Swedish woman of Kurdish descent. As such, so called »honour killings« has been one of many subjects relating to my background that I have taken an interest in over the years.

The first »honour killing« that I was told about occurred in the Iraqi part of Kurdistan many years ago, when I was still a child and long before the murder of Fadime Sahindal, who is the nexus subject of this study, occurred. A young girl was murdered in a small village and the place where the murder took place seemed like a symbol, since it in my eyes maintained the patriarchal system, a system that is regulating social rules and behaviour in most parts of the world. All girls passing by that very spot, a path I was told, knew very well what could happen if they »did not follow the rules«. I still remember the quivering I felt when I heard about the fate of this girl and similar murders that I since have heard about. It is no lie that murders like these happen in the Middle East. The interesting aspect however is not the violence against women, as it is global, but how it is explained and in particular how violence against women in other cultures are described in the Western world where such violence in the eyes of Westerners does not exist.

This case study focuses on the murder of 26 year-old Fadime Sahindal, and on the massive debate it triggered – still ongoing – in Swedish media and society. The murder has not only enraged and engaged people in Sweden, but in our neighbouring countries as well, particularly in Denmark and Norway¹. The report will focus on different aspects of the debate. Firstly; the news reporting and the ensuing public debate in media, regardless of what position the participants held, focused on the concept of culture – whether violence against women in general or specifically »honour killings« is cultural – if it should be viewed as a phenomena relating to a specific culture or not. Secondly; the actions taken by authorities will be analysed and how this issue illuminates the relationship between the Swedish society on one side and the migrants, in particular those of Middle Eastern origin, on the other.

The third aspect that this report will be dealing with is politics. Firstly, how xenophobic parties use events like »honour killings« in their propaganda to describe immigrants, particularly Muslims, as violence prone and sexist. Secondly, on the 15th of September 2002 the general elections took place and a large part of the major political parties' campaigns focused on the integration issue. Although only xenophobic parties were outspoken in the criticism of immigration as such, several mainstream parties touched on the subject and, in one case, suggested that sharper demands should be made on knowledge of language for migrants applying for citizenship. Racism and xenophobia is widely discussed in Sweden, not the least due to the emergence of large anti-immigration parties in other European countries, most recently in Denmark.

The murder of Fadime Sahindal took place only a couple of months after the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York. Regardless of intention, the two events have

¹ It should be noted that the Fadime killing has caused a massive media attention and debate in Norway, although not a single known case of »honour killing« has occurred in that country. This inconsistency shows that the subject is transcending national borders and radically affects people.

to some extent affected the integration debate and in particular Swedish society versus the Muslim population living in Sweden. Regarding the debate after the honour killing it is mainly Kurds that have participated in the debate.

I have followed media and the activities of the national authorities, e. g. the Ministry of Industry, in the six month period following the Fadime murder. Other ministries and government offices are also involved in the broader issue from different perspectives; integration, gender, legislative etc. Also, I have examined the work of the NGO's. The material used in this case study first and foremost originates in the media, mainly the daily press and Internet sites, but also to some extent the Swedish national television.

It has to be emphasised that the aim of this report is not to explain the underlying causes for the murder of Fadime Sahindal, but rather to describe the debate and various explanations for the murder, which the debate has focused on. I will also sometimes refer to articles and measures taken before the murder, as this debate on »honour related crimes« originally began in 1999 with a similar murder of a Kurdish girl, Pela Atroshi, who also became heavily featured in media.

2. Background

On the 21st of January 2002, 26 year-old Fadime Sahindal was murdered by her father in Uppsala, approximately 80-km north from Stockholm. The murder became one of the largest media stories of the year with an intensive coverage in TV and the daily press alike. For two weeks it was the single leading story, eclipsing news about the war in Afghanistan and other large topics. The Fadime Sahindal murder touched Swedish people.

One reason was that Fadime was not an unknown anonymous migrant girl, but an outspoken woman. Due to a previous verdict against her father and her brother she had previously appeared in the Media. As a result there was a lot of pictures and previous TV interviews with her. That was the major factor which contributed to making her »alive« to the general public. She became a symbol and a household name. The last time she appeared in public was at a seminar about immigrant women's situation in the Swedish parliament in November, three months prior to the murder. Her speech there has been cited many times since then. Thus, her fate was well known to the Swedish public long before her father killed her.

I met Fadime Sahindal at this very seminar in the Swedish parliament. We talked for a while and I asked her about her family and if she was in touch with them. She told me that she occasionally met her female relatives, her mother and sisters. I remember that I was very touched by her speech. I had never previously met a girl subjected to the kind of threats Fadime was, neither of Kurdish nor of Swedish origin. A couple of months later when I read about the murder in the newspapers and heard about it from friends I could hardly believe it. I was very shocked. She felt so lively and now she was dead. Everybody was in great shock, even the people that had never met her in person, and in particular within the Kurdish community.

Fadime Sahindal's fate was that she fell in love with a Swedish boy and their love story had to be kept secret from her family. The boy was not entirely Swedish; as a matter of fact he had an Iranian father and his father went to Fadime dal's father in vain to ask for her hand in a customary Middle Eastern way (e. g. a traditional way to ask for marriage). Their love story ended very sadly as the boyfriend was killed in a car accident, just shortly after Fadime had chosen to leave her family.

Fadime Sahindal moved away from her home city to a town in north Sweden. There she studied to become a social worker. When she was murdered she almost had finished her studies. She was also an active member of the Social Democratic Party's youth organisation (SSU). For several years she lived in isolation in her new hometown with no contact with the male members of her family. During the last years of her life she only saw the female members of the family, the mother and her sisters, who met in secret and never in the city of Uppsala.

It was on her first return visit to Uppsala after the running away that she was murdered. It has been argued that, sadly, if she had chosen not to return to her hometown she would probably have been alive today. The fact was that although she was threatened by her male relatives, as long as she lived in another city she could be safe as she then did not seem to challenge her father; he could be excused by saying that he had rejected her from the family and her hometown.

Fadime Sahindal's father was sentenced to life in prison for the killing. He has tried to appeal to higher court without any success.

The murder of Fadime Sahindal was the third known case of a so-called »honour killings«² that has happened in Sweden or concerned girls living in Sweden in the past few years. In June 1999 another girl of Kurdish origin, Pela Atroshi, was shot to death by her uncles and father in front of her mother and sister in the Iraqi part of Kurdistan. Pela Atroshi lived in a southern suburb to Stockholm, but was in Kurdistan on vacation when she was murdered in cold blood.

The Pela Atroshi murder was unknown for almost a year, until eventually the sister – who was kept against her will in Iraq – managed to contact Swedish authorities and with their help escape to Sweden.

During a trial by the Kurdish authorities, the father and uncles was given a suspended sentence. He did not have Swedish citizenship and since the murder of his daughter he has chosen not to return to Sweden. The uncles of Pela Atroshi, however, did return as they had Swedish citizenship.³ When the uncles arrived back in Sweden from Kurdistan they were arrested and brought to a second trial in a Swedish court. In January 2001 they were sentenced to lifetime imprisonment for murder.

The first honour killing known to the Swedish public took place in Umea in northern Sweden in 1996. 15-year-old Sara of Iraqi origin was strangled to death by her brother and a cousin. According to media she was murdered due to her way of living; she loved to go out dancing, something quite normal for a fifteen-year-old girl in Sweden.

² I will henceforth in the report use the wording »honour killing«, even though I myself do find the term questionable.

³ In this case this could have lead to a deportation, if he had been on trial in Sweden.

3. Media reporting on the Fadime Sahindal murder

The media response to the murder of Fadime Sahindal has been enormous. She has become a martyr, not only in Sweden, struggling for her right to choose her own way of living and gave her life for this purpose. Although she was known before she was murdered, due to the three interviews with her when her brother and father threatened her, she became world-famous in her death, as numerous papers all around the world wrote about the murder.

On a Wednesday a few days after the murder, memorial ceremonies were held for her all over the country, the majority of them arranged by various women's associations and Kurdish organisations. Although she was born a Muslim a memorial ceremony was held for her in the cathedral of Uppsala, one of the most prestigious churches in the country. Thousands of people attended to the memorial ceremony, which resembled a state funeral, and among the most known attendants were Crown Princess Victoria, Integration minister Mona Sahlin and the social democratic Member of Parliament Nalin Pekgul. The dean of the Uppsala Cathedral, Tuulikki Koivunen Bylund, said at the funeral that Fadime is for her "*one of our time's martyrs*"⁴. One of the national TV stations (TV4) broadcasted live from her memorial ceremony in the cathedral.

The week after her death an enormous amount of articles were published about her, her family situation, her fathers background, interviews with her sisters etc. One Swedish daily even sent reporters to visit and interview members of the family in their Kurdistan home village.

The only individuals never interviewed were her younger brother and her father. The father's situation was nonetheless meticulously described; how he barely could speak any Swedish after all the years in Sweden, how Fadime Sahindal would help him when he wanted to take a driving license etc. Although the father was rarely described in depth, he was in that regard to some extent also represented as a victim – as well as his daughter had been – a man living in a segregated country, marginalized outside the normal traditions and rules of society, even marginalized among »his own«; the Kurdish community.

After the murder, the four major Swedish newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*, have had series of articles on migrant girls subject to patriarchal oppression.

The composition of media news reporting in different papers has had similar characteristics. Journalists have generally focused on an individual's story: a victim – for instance a girl that is kept in hiding from her family, a representative from Swedish women organisations or women shelters, and in some cases they have even interviewed women working with gender issues in Kurdistan, exclusively from the Iraqi part of Kurdistan.

Very seldom, however, has media focused on or interviewed girls of Middle-Eastern origin that are not subject to violence in their families; girls who are studying, choosing their own marriage partner or having boyfriends without being subject to threats or to violence due to honour. In the few instances that such girls and young women have actually been interviewed,

⁴ *Expressen*, 4th of February

it has generally in some way still been related to honour, with the girls acting as representatives of migrant girls in general regarding these issues.

3.1 Kurdish men – oppressors?

In the weeks following the Fadime Sahindal murder, many Kurdish men were interviewed about their personal views on girls and their upbringing, sometimes with a very complex result. In an article in Sweden's major daily newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, dated only three days after the murder of Fadime Sahindal, the chairman of the Kurdish association in Malmö, Kamaran Shwan, says about his own thirteen-year-old daughter on the question whether she may choose future husband or not:

*“Yes. She chooses but I have to approve of him. If I know he is the wrong man for her I have to stop him.”*⁵

Kamaran Shwan strongly repudiates killing one's daughter on honorary ground and states that no Kurdish man accepts it. However, regarding Fadime Sahindal's murder adds that he »understands the father«. The comment was not an expression of support for support for the killing, but rather an acknowledgement of an intellectual understanding of the situation.

After being interviewed in several Swedish newspapers, which in his eyes had misunderstood and misinterpreted him, he received many threatening telephone calls and letters. The mistake he may have done was that he said that he »understood« the father, which may have been misrepresented as an acceptance of the brutal killing. In another article Kamaran Shwan, says that media has been the culprit regarding the agitation against Kurds after the murder of Fadime Sahindal.⁶

In general, the message was clear. Many Kurdish men were asked the same questions; how they would treat his daughter if she decided to choose her own partner. They were also questioned if they themselves would consider forcing or threatening their daughters, and even if this last question was never openly phrased in an interview, journalists (and readers) bore it in mind, which naturally affected the interview.

Many Kurdish men felt attacked. According to *Dagens Nyheter*⁸ there was an increase of threats by telephone, letters and fax to the Kurdish National Association (Kurdiska Riksförbundet) in the days following the Fadime Sahindal murder. In an interview the chairman of the association says that he fails to understand why a whole ethnic group is blamed for the crime of one individual.

Following the murder of Fadime Sahindal, Kurdish politician Ahmed Eskandari was prominently featured in interviews and also wrote a number of articles in an attempt to explain what had happened and why. As a Kurdish man living in Sweden he strongly repudiates honour crimes and oppression of women. In an article in the feminist magazine *Women against fundamentalism (Kvinnor mot fundamentalism)*⁹ he was introduced in following way:

⁵ *Dagens Nyheter*, 24th of January

⁶ *Integration i Fokus* (In focus of Integration) no. 1/2002.

⁸ *Dagens Nyheter*, 24th of January 2002

⁹ *Kvinnor mot fundamentalism* (Women against fundamentalism), 22-23: 24-27

“Ahmad Eskandari is a man, Kurd and cannot identify with the father of Fadime.”

In his explanation on what he cannot identify with, he dealt with the role segregation plays; that »Fadime’s only »crime« was that she refused to bring the rest of her life with her father and »the other« on the isolated island that they had themselves created in the middle of the Swedish society.« Ahmad Eskandari did not however in the article blame society for this segregation, as he seemed to imply that it was to some extent self-chosen. On the other hand he blamed authorities for blinking at the fact that there are migrant women and girls who are subjected to this kind of patriarchal violence. In the case of Fadime Sahindal, authorities knew what may happen, but chose not to take any measures.

Ahmad Eskandari appeared in another article on the same subject, in the name of honour. Under the headlines *Kurdish men and their daughters* and *The Stranger and his daughter*, he and his daughter were interviewed in order to represent a »healthy relationship« between a man of Kurdish origin and his daughter. Ahmed Eskandari was in this article introduced in following way:

»The stranger with black, curly hair from the Iranian Kurdistan was 36 years old when he escaped to Huddinge¹⁰ with his wife and son. A man from a devout home with traditional values. The life in Huddinge was for him like a pitch-dark wardrobe. Strange language, strange customs, strange laws, strange everything. In only a couple of weeks the stranger’s wife were going to give birth to a child. A girl.«¹¹

A new Kurdish association was established directly after the murder of Fadime Sahindal; Kurdish men against oppression against women (Kurdiska män mot kvinnoförtryck). The group, which is only consisting of men, was as a response to show that there are Kurdish men who do not oppress women and who support the women’s liberation movement. In an article about this newly established association the chairman Bahman Garemani said that they want to show Kurdish men that there is no discrepancy between the Kurdish identity and a humanitarian and liberal attitude towards women.¹²

3.2 The question of culture

The media debate – that is the large number of texts not dealing with news reporting but commenting on the issue and published as editorials, cultural pages or op-ed pages – after the murder of Fadime Sahindal has largely focused on the cultural aspect; that violence against women is related to culture, in particular remote and strongly patriarchal cultures. On the other hand many voices have been raised that argue that violence against women is a global matter, that most societies, including Sweden, have a patriarchal structure.

Among the participants in the debate a majority is made up of Kurds, which may be natural as both Fadime Sahindal and Pela Atroshi were of Kurdish origin. Many men have participated, mostly representatives of Kurdish organisations, e g Kurdish National Association in Sweden (Kurdiska Riksförbundet).

¹⁰ Suburb in southern Stockholm

¹¹ *Integration i Fokus* 1/2002: 6

¹² <http://www.svt.se/nyheter/2002/020317/kurdman.htm>. More information about this organisation can be found at <http://members01.chello.se/kurd/min.html>

The Kurdish women who have appeared are both from Swedish political parties or lobby groups, mainly well educated, and totally integrated in Swedish society. They can be seen as »strong« versus the normally victimised »weak« Muslim women that are recurrently brought up in media. The whole debate on migrant women has after the murder has only one focus; namely on their subjection to patriarchy.

The murder of Fadime Sahindal has not through media changed this somewhat prejudiced view on Muslim women in Swedish society and Muslim women in general. On the contrary it has to some extent confirmed the view that Muslim women are »victims« of a patriarchal tradition and women that are strong and want to break with their culture come up with difficulties with their lives at stake. Thus, a media picture of girls and women of Middle Eastern origin as victims of their culture is maintained.

After the murder of Pela Atroshi, an organisation called Don't forget Pela (Glöm inte Pela) was established. After the murder of Fadime Sahindal the organisation changed its name Don't forget Pela and Fadime.

Representatives of these organisations have appeared at many of the great number of manifestations held in memory of these two young women. Their aim is to illuminate migrant women's situation in Swedish society, in particular young first- and second-generation migrant women and girls. Their spokesperson, Sara Mohammad, has been a militant advocate for migrant women's right to choose for themselves. She is strongly anti-Islamite in her feminist approach and just after the murder of Fadime Sahindal she demanded restrictions regarding legislation on migration and integration, such as a ban on veil for girls under 16 years of age and increased control of the organisations that receive state funds that their attitude toward women is approved of before being granted. In an interview for Sveriges television (Swedish public service television) Sara Mohammad stated:

»People have wearied of always hearing of and seeing that many migrant girls are in danger and are threatened to die. So far the integration politics have only respected the culture and the religion instead of respecting the individual and human rights.«¹³

Also women working for women's shelters and other women's organisations have been seen in the debate. Most of these representatives are of foreign origin. The lawyer Elisabeth Fritz is one of them; she has appeared as one of the more ardent participants in the debate and represents a view estimating that as many as 90 percent of girls of Middle Eastern origin living in Sweden have problems with their parents. She is also one of the strongest advocates for the cultural aspect of honour killing. Elisabeth Fritz was Pela Atroshi's younger sister Breen's lawyer in the case against the uncles.

In an article in *Svenska Dagbladet* before the murder of Fadime Sahindal, she said:

»...It should even be possible to withdraw Swedish citizenship if people commit such serious crimes that honour killings and deprivation of liberty are.«¹⁴

¹³ Sara Mohammad in SVT:s (Swedish public service television), internet edition, February 4th
<http://www.svt.se/nyheter/2002/020204/114.html>

¹⁴ *Svenska Dagbladet*, 17 December 2001

However, in an article in *Expressen*¹⁵ just a few days after the murder of Fadime Sahindal, Elisabeth Fritz opposed herself by saying that citizenship should not be withdrawn, in particular for people like the Kurds that otherwise may risk being stateless.

Elisabeth Fritz has thus become one of the most eager and engaged spokeswomen of the victimised Middle Eastern girls. In addition, the National Association for Professional Women (Yrkeskvinnornas Riksförbund) awarded her with the prize »the Professional woman of the year 2002« in March the same year. In the introduction of the article about the prize she was introduced in following way:

»She has chosen to act in the place of the weakest and most subjected groups in society – the migrant women – with great commitment.«

Other women with the same background as she has, well educated and from Middle Eastern descent, have also suggested restrictions in migration and integration legislation and also harsher punishment for honour related crimes.

In a TV-debate on honour killing broadcasted a few days after the murder of Fadime Sahindal, author and media worker Dilsa Demirbag-Sten suggested that different tests in the Swedish language and Swedish values should be introduced before people can be granted Swedish citizenship. The other participants in the debate heavily castigated her for this statement. On the other hand, she in a contribution to a debate¹⁶ criticised other representatives of Swedish migrant associations for their will to restrict migration and integration legislation, such as withdrawing citizenship due to honour related crimes, and to forbid children under 16 to wear a veil. She is one of the few participants in the debate who is dealing with how segregation in society may be a contributing factor to phenomena's such as honour killings, and that this is a failure of the Swedish integration policy.

»The Fadime case is an extremely tragic combination of an integration policy that has failed and a blinded father under extreme pressure, that sees the murder of his own flesh and blood as the only solution to his own unbearable situation.«¹⁷

In this article she views honour killings as a degeneration of culture, a person's own notion, e.g. the father, without relation to religion as Fadime Sahindal did not come from a religious home. However, in a more recent interview¹⁸ she criticises the people behind the notion that honour killing is not cultural but rather a manifestation for the global oppression of women by saying that it is a cultural tradition. She also states that this problem is widespread as she has met many girls in the schools with problems related to honour. Dilsa Demirbag-Sten also explains in this interview that she is not one of these girls as her parents always encouraged the children to get educated and choose for themselves.

Most women of Middle Eastern origin that have participated in the debate after the murder explain honour killings as a cultural and/or religious, i.e. Muslim, tradition practised in the Middle Eastern countries. In contrast, Swedish women and also men that have participated in

¹⁵ *Expressen* 24th of January 2002

¹⁶ *Svenska Dagbladet*, 25th of January 2002

¹⁷ *Svenska Dagbladet*, 25th of January 2002

¹⁸ *Dagens Nyheter*, 30th of June 2002

the debate, to a much larger extent view honour killings from a global feminist or anti-sexist perspective – that honour killings are one expression of many forms of oppression of women.

Åsa Eldén, who is studying for a doctor's degree in sociology at Uppsala University, says in an article that if honour killings are explained as cultural traditions then also Swedish men's violence against women should be explained as culturally conditioned.

»In different societies men use different explanations to make their crimes to look less abominable – yes, even acceptable. It can be about honour, about mental problems, about jealousy. Practicable explanations can be taken from Arabic, Kurdish, Swedish and Danish cultural conceptions of (or Christian, Muslim and Hindu religious ditto) a man's right to decide over and control a woman – sometimes also a right to decide if she will live or die.«¹⁹

A few months before Fadime Sahindal was murdered, a young Swedish woman, Melissa, was also murdered. Some patterns were similar to the Fadime murder. Both women were killed by older men, Fadime by her father and Melissa by her older ex boyfriend. Melissa was killed because of jealousy and a need of the boyfriend to »control« her behaviour, while Fadime was killed because of a schism in her family where the male members had a need to »control« her behaviour.

The advocates of the line that honour killings should be viewed part of a larger universal violence against women and children – not primarily as a culture related issue – argue that other recent murders, so-called Sweden-specific murders, have not and can not be explained »culturally«.

»If culture was the reason for Fadime's murder, why isn't culture used as an explanation for the murders of Swedish women«.

One of these comparisons was one made by the journalist and author Jan Guillou.²⁰ In a program on Swedish National Television he compared the murder of Fadime with a much publicised attempted murder of a child by a Swedish mother. The mother hurled her three-year old son into the water from a bridge in central Stockholm. This murder was explained in social terms in media and not as something »specific for Swedish culture« and was according to Guillou neglected by the public as such. Therefore it cannot be explained by cultural differences. Under the headline *The lying of Guillou encourages the xenophobes*, another participant in the debate, editor Ernst Klein, criticised Guillou's opinion that the Swedish media coverage of the murder of Fadime Sahindal was xenophobic. According to Klein there are cultural differences, an honour killing cannot be compared to a murder of a small child, and blinking at this fact is playing into the hands of the xenophobes.

The social democrat Member of Parliament Nalin Pekgul, herself of Kurdish origin, opposed his view by saying that honour killing is something belonging to a cultural tradition and that the Kurdish society, if there is one, is patriarchal. In many articles she has been stating that the majority of Kurdish girls in Sweden are victims of this women repressive tradition, even though the violence very seldom is fatal. However, she is worried that all negative attention about the Kurdish community in Sweden will increase public prejudice against this group in particular.

¹⁹ Eldén Åsa, *Honour killing in the paradise of equality*, anticle in *Jalla! Nu klär vi granen – möte med den muslimska kultursfären* (The ministry of Foreign Affairs) February 2002, p. 31.

²⁰ *Svenska Dagbladet*, 9th of March, 2002

Doctor Mikael Kurkiala, a cultural anthropologist, is one of the most vocal proponents of a »cultural explanation« in the debate following the murder of Fadime Sahindal. Due to the fact that he has a degree in cultural anthropology, several opponents have referred to his perspective as a so called »cultural anthropological line«.²¹ Kurkiala focuses on the cultural perspective and the differences between cultures, arguing that honour killings is something culturally specific, something that is particular for some cultures such as the Kurdish.

In an article in *Dagens Nyheter*²², he criticised the whole establishment, not the least Kurdish male intellectuals such as Kurdo Baksi and the representatives of the Kurdish National Association in Sweden, and »left-wingers« such as Jan Guillou, for not taking the honour killings seriously, i.e. for not accepting that there are cultural differences between people in various parts of the world. Kurkiala also maintain that many participants in the debate have made excuses – for instance claiming that the father was »crazy« or comparing the Fadime murder with other (non-honour related) murders occurring in Sweden along with crimes like incest and paedophilia. The question he is posing is »why are people so afraid of differences« and if so – »how are we else going to explain cultures?« In the *Dagens Nyheter* article he referred to the integration minister Mona Sahlin, who a few days after the murder of Fadime in an interview in *Aftonbladet* said:

»Yes ... I have talked about general power structures. I simply was afraid to sound like the [xenophobic party] Sweden Democrats.«²³

The argument for honour killing as something fundamentally different from Swedish »culture«, was met by Kurdo Baksi who remarked that if the killing of Fadime Sahindal was culturally specific for Kurdish culture, than the only way to take measures would be to fight against the Kurdish culture itself. This stand, according to Baksi, would eventually imply intolerance and ethnic cleansing.²⁴

Recently a new book on honour killings has been released, *The honour killing on Pela*, by journalist Lena Katarina Swanberg²⁵. As the name of the book implies it is about Pela Atroshi, who was killed in 1999 by her father and uncles in the Iraqi part of Kurdistan. The book release has spurred new articles and in the Swedish daily press and on national TV stations, featuring among others Pela's sister Breen Atroshi, who testified against her uncles. In addition a documentary on the murder was recently broadcasted on national television. In the two years following the trial Breen Atroshi has been living in constant fear of her male relatives. She has changed her name and is kept in hiding, protected by bodyguards. Also the lawyer in the Pela Atroshi case, Elisabeth Fritz, has again appeared in the interviews.

Considering all the articles and texts published, it is obvious that the discussion on how honour killings should be explained is not an easy subject to handle, and that participants often ends up in a black and white war of trenches.

²¹ Cultural anthropology is a discipline with several theories and explanations and should therefore not be mixed up with Dr Kurkiala's own view on the explanation for honour related crimes.

²² *Dagens Nyheter*, 6 March, 2002

²³ Referring to the xenophobic party Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats)

²⁴ *Dagens Nyheter*, 10 Mars 2002.

²⁵ Lena Katarina Swanberg, *Hedersmordet på Pela* (The honour killing of Pela), Stockholm 2002

With numerous exceptions, the participants in the debate can broadly be divided into two main groups.

One line of arguments believes in the »cultural explanation«; that honour killings is a specific expression of a specific culture that is pre-dominantly Islamic or Middle-Eastern. Adherents to this line of argument often (but not always) claim that a refusal to accept a »cultural explanation model« is a betrayal of the girls subjected to this specific form of oppression and – at worst – may be an attempt to find excuses the men keeping the system alive. Adherents to this explanation are of both feminist and non-feminist approach.

Opposing the »cultural explanation model« are adherents of a »universal explanation model« which claim that the root of the problem is not the Kurdish or Muslim »culture«, but a general oppression of women – the patriarchal system that exists in Kurdistan as well as Japan or Sweden, and which only find different expressions due to different traditions. In this explanation, male violence against women is the problem – not a specific expression of male violence. The proponents of a universal explanation are made up of predominantly Swedish feminists, both women and men.

The whole integration debate after both the World Trade Centre attack and the murder of Fadime Sahindal has increasingly focused on in particular the Muslim migrant group and many voices have been raised that express increased »demands« on the immigrants i.e. to submit to the cultural expressions and values of Sweden. Some arguments used in this debate has sometimes not been unlike the arguments of the traditional xenophobic parties. The only difference is however that these voices more often come from the migrant population and not from Swedes.

4. The response of the authorities

The situation of migrant women has been in focus for many years, although the attention has increased dramatically after the murder on Fadime Sahindal and Pela Atroshi. In 1999 the issue of first and second-generation migrant girls was in focus, as the Integration Board released their report *Let's talk about girls...*²⁷

This report was one of the first attempts by the authorities to initiate a broader discussion about the situation of the problems facing migrant girls. The Integration Board was careful not to problemize the issue, as the aim was rather to illuminate a comprehensive picture of the girls' general situation. This was nevertheless brought up in media as a somewhat cowardly move from the Integration Board. On the release day, media went out to segregated suburbs in the largest Swedish cities to map out their view on this issue, e.g. the subjection of first- and second-generation migrant girls when forced to early marriages, female circumcision and the carrying of veils etc.

The murder of Pela Atroshi became known to the public almost at the same time as the release of the Integration Board-report on migrant girls, and contributed to focus interest on the issue.

However, the outcome of the report was mixed. One of the most discussed issues after the release concerned the legislation regarding marriages for non-Swedish citizens compared to Swedish citizens. In Sweden the law prohibits marriages for Swedish citizens under 18 years of age without expressed consent from authorities, while for non-Swedish citizens the legislation of the home country regarding marital age is applied. This is by itself an issue that several NGOs in Sweden have criticised as a misguided discriminatory practice. The discussion led to a committee review of the legislation, although suggestions for changes were presented rather late, in fact not until after the murder of Fadime Sahindal in February 2002. During recent years, lots of attention in media and the society as a whole has focused on violence against women in general. According to a recent report from the National Council for Crime Prevention²⁸, this attention may partly have led to an increase in reports on crimes regarding violence against women. Women subjected to men's violence have become more open to both report and willing to come forward and tell about their situation during interviews. This may also be the pattern for girls subjected to violence in their homes.

4.1 National Council for Women's Peace

There are a number of initiatives for girls subjected to patriarchal family violence. After the murder of Fadime Sahindal the Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications²⁹ was working very hard on these issues. In particular Integration minister Mona Sahlin, who went on visits to several immigrant organisations, among them The Kurdish National

²⁷ *Låt oss tala om flickor...* (Let us talk about girls); Swedish Integration Board, Integrationsverkets rapportserie 2000:6.

²⁸ *Våld mot kvinnor i nära relationer. En kartläggning* (Violence against women in close relationships. A mapping); Brottsförebyggande rådet (the National Council for Crime Prevention) Rapport 2002: 14.

²⁹ Issues of integration rests under the Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications.

Association³⁰, to talk about girls subjected to patriarchal violence. Mona Sahlin also knew Fadime Sahindal in person, as they were both members of the Social Democratic party.

In February 2002, only a few weeks after the murder, the Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications, presented a document on the governmental work for subject girls in patriarchal families³¹. It was at this time a new concept for these girls was launched by the authorities; namely subject girls in patriarchal families. Authorities have subsequently used this concept in the discussion.

Although governmental efforts have been intensified after the murder of Fadime Sahindal, this work actually began in year 2000 following the murder of Pela Atroshi. One of the first actions was the establishing of a National Council for Women's Peace.³² This institution has held one seminar focusing on honour related crimes.

In addition the government has held two seminars on how to improve the situation for the subject girls and their families. In addition the government has appointed an expert committee to look into measures and activities to help and protect girls subjected to patriarchal violence. One of the members in this expert committee group is the MP Nalin Pekgul. The task of this group is also to suggest measures to reach men and boys with strong patriarchal values. An amount of 2 million SEK has been set apart to use for shelter for the most subject girls.

In addition the government decided in November 2001 to review the system of the reception and introduction for newly arrived refugees, and to increase their knowledge on fundamental values of the Swedish society.

Simultaneously, the Swedish government commissioned to the county administrative boards of the three major cities, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, to map out subjected girls from patriarchal backgrounds. In June 2002, the three county administrative boards presented their reports on this mapping. The Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications also has made it clear that activities in this area are in priority regarding grants from the state, in particular projects in the three metropolitan areas Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.

Other projects not focussing directly on subjected girls from patriarchal backgrounds but rather on subjected girls in general encounter problems here, as they have difficulties in being granted money when they do not have the word »patriarchal« in their project application.

4.2 Exit Motala

One of the projects focusing on all sorts of girls subjected to violence and oppression is the Exit project in Motala, a town located in-between Stockholm and Gothenburg. This group have mostly worked with girls that have been with or been in the periphery of Nazi or racist movements, where the girls have been subjected to all forms of oppression due to the fact that the attitudes towards women leaves a bit to be wished for in such groups. The girls need a shelter to get away from the gangs as well as to simply get their life in order.

³⁰ Kurdiska Riksförbundet

³¹ *The governments' work for subject girls in patriarchal families* (The Swedish Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications) February 2002.

³² Nationellt råd för Kvinnofrid

This shelter could also be used for girls who have run away from family violence. Since governmental funding is set apart for a particular group of girls, the ones in patriarchal families, it is difficult for projects, such as the one in Motala, which focuses on general violence against young women, to get grants.

4.3 Illuminating Islam

A rather positive initiative was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' release of the book *Jalla! Let us dress the Christmas tree*³⁴, with an aim to illuminate Islam to schoolchildren. The starting-point is the World Trade Centre attack and the murder of Fadime Sahindal; several articles deal with honour crimes and the situation of first- and second-generation girls of Middle Eastern origin.

Also, among the issues discussed in this book, is how media is somewhat Islamophobic in its representation of this particular religion. Media critics among immigrant organisations claim that the reporting often help create a duality in form of »we the Christians« versus »them the Muslims«. The book is an attempt to give schoolchildren a good knowledge of Islam, in particular schoolchildren who normally do not meet with Muslims.

4.4 Related issues

Women subjected to violence are not a matter that entirely ends up on the table of the Integration Minister, but this is the case regarding honour related crimes. Gender relations is something that can be related to several other Ministries. As judicial issues about marriage age and harsher punishment against honour killers are matters belonging to the Ministry of Justice, issues regarding gender lies mainly under Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. The Minister of Equality also belongs to the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. A reason for the authorities to treat violence within patriarchal families as an integration issue may be because they relate it with their own failure to integrate families coming to Sweden. Sweden is in many aspects – culturally, economically and socially – still a segregated nation.

Another measure that has been suggested is that the Swedish Police must learn to separate murders from suicide in suspected honour-related crimes. In an article in *Dagens Nyheter*³⁵ it is stated that the police has to be observant on that honour killings sometimes are arranged to look like suicides. Without giving any particular evidence, the article has police investigators stating that suicides are arranged when only the family know of the girls »bad reputation«, while the girl can be openly murdered when the reputation is more spread as in the case of Fadime.

³⁴ *Jalla! Nu klär vi granen – möte med den muslimska kultursfären (Jalla! Let us dress the Christmas tree - a meeting with the Muslim cultural sphere)*; The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Stockholm, February 2002.

³⁵ *Dagens Nyheter* 27th May 2002

5. The work of the NGOs regarding women's issues

A great number of NGOs are working to counteract men's violence against women in general. There are two major umbrella organisations for local woman shelter, the **National Association for women shelters in Sweden**³⁶ and **Sweden's Women shelters' National Association**³⁷. A few groups associated with these umbrella organisations are focusing on migrant women. The two most known are **Terrafem** and **Somaya** (for believing Muslim women). Among their activities are emergency telephone answering services and the offering of shelter for women running away from male violence.

Terrafem is the one of the women organisations that has been most salient in Swedish media after the murder of Fadime Sahindal. Its chairwoman, Bernardita Nunez, has participated in TV debates and memorial ceremonies for Fadime. She has also written chronicles about the case of Fadime. In one of the chronicles she strongly argues that the majority of the arguments that has emerged after the murder have been racist, in particular the talk on increased requirements, e.g. "driving licence" on Swedish values, on migrant men.

»The basis for this proposal is the same as the talk on cultural causes to violence, namely that ethnic Swedes have sound values and that people from the Middle East have violent values. Swedes know how to do things and have to teach migrants how to behave. This argument is racist, as it makes foreign men as a group in Sweden considerably more dangerous than Swedes.«³⁸

The organisation Somaya that mainly works with believing Muslim women and girls has been far less visible compared to Terrafem. Somaya is however working with both women subject to violence in marriages and the subject daughters in Muslim families. They also have an emergency telephone answering service for the girls.

Another women's organisation that have made an impact on this debate is **Women's network**³⁹, that since 1997 runs an advisory service for newly arrived women in Sweden and for women subjected to violence and threats. They also have a radio program called *Women's Voice*.

5.1 Save the Children

At the side of the Women's Shelter movement, the **Save the Children Fund** is one of the largest NGOs in Sweden working in this and related areas. Their target group is not only on the subject girls, although they have an emergency telephone answering service for girls living between two cultures.

Save the Children also have activities for men, namely the migrant men. The project for migrant men, mainly fathers, is called the *Dialogue project*⁴⁰ and focuses on the dialogue

³⁶ Riksorganisationen för kvinnojourer i Sverige (ROKS)

³⁷ Sveriges Kvinnojourers Riksförbund

³⁸ *Kvinnotryck*, 1/2002, http://www.roks.se/kvinnotryck/kt1_02_kronika.html

³⁹ Kvinnors nätverk, <http://www.kvinnonet.org/>

⁴⁰ *Dialogprojektet*

between fathers and their sons. This is part of the **Men's Network**⁴¹; a network that started in the beginning of the 1990's, and that since has worked with gender related issues.

The Dialogue project aims to initiate a discussion between men on the premise that women who are subjected to violence are that because of men's behaviour. Another aim is to make men aware of the necessity of changing male attitudes towards women. According to the men responsible for the Dialogue project⁴², males living in Sweden have to learn and accept the role men in Sweden have, therefore they have to analyse their own behaviour. In the beginning this was more about the men's role than the woman's role, but after the murders of Pela Atroshi and Fadime Sahindal it has changed to involve men's relations to women in a broader sense.

The Swedish Save the Children Fund have also very recently released a *survival handbook* for subject girls living in two cultures⁴³. This is the organisation's third survival handbook. This time the focus is on migrant girls halfway between two cultures. In the press release on the book they state that this group of girls have been deserted by society. The aim of the book is to present an overall picture of subject girls living in between several cultures and also to present tangible suggestions for girls in similar situations. They do not however want to present a too pitch-dark version as they have chosen to show there is hope as the girls, women and men, interviewed in this book have found alternatives. Among the more known interviewees are MP Nalin Pekgul and Kickis Åhré Älgemo, who is regarded as Sweden's top police expert on honour killings. As a police Älgemo investigated the murder case of Pela Atroshi, and was involved in rescuing her younger sister Breen Atroshi from Kurdistan.

The Swedish Save the Children Fund have also taken the initiative to a series of seminars that will begin in the autumn 2002, focusing on girls originally from countries where patriarchal notions prevail. Among the people lecturing at the seminars are people who either have been involved in the media debate or people working with subject girls.

One of the lecturers that is invited is Dr Riyadh Al Baldawi; a man who also has participated in the debate in media. He runs a clinic with the aim too treat people from the Middle East, the Orient Health clinic⁴⁴, where he has met a lot of girls and their families in his medical capacity. At the Orient Health Clinic they work with both the whole family and the girls.

5.2 Children's Rights in Society

Another very important organisation working for children and their rights in Sweden is the Children's Rights in Society.⁴⁵ This organisation has successfully worked with children subject to violence in their homes and in school for many years, e g they run an emergency telephone hotline for children. They are carrying out a new project aiming at migrant children and their families. The aim of the project is to increase the knowledge on rights and obligation among migrant children and their families in order to encourage and support them in their role

⁴¹ Manliga nätverket

⁴² http://www.integration.nu/foreningar/mote/dialogprojektet_txt.htm. More information on the project can be found on <http://www.man-net.nu/ppt/Mnpresent/MnGS0202/sld014.htm>

⁴³ *Överlevnadshandbok för flickor om frihet och heder (Survival handbook for girls on freedom and honour)* Swedish Save the Children, September, 2002.

⁴⁴ Orienthälsan

⁴⁵ BRIS, Barnens rätt i samhället. More information about this organisation can be found at www.bris.se

as parents, giving them possibilities to increase their participation and influence in the Swedish society, as a lead towards a more democratic society.

5.3 Kurdish National Association

Also the main National Associations of people from the Middle East (i.e. e. the Turkish, the Kurdish, the Iranian and also the Somali) have different projects to try to overcome differences between parents and their children, mainly daughters. The Turkish National Association, Iranian National Association, Somali National Association and the Bosnian National Association run Dialogue projects together with the Swedish Save the Children Fund.

The project run by the Kurdish National Association is called the *Generation Conflict* and was in 2000 evaluated by two Psychology students.⁴⁶ The aim of this project was to initiate a discussion on gender related issues and a dialogue between parents and their children on these matters and took place in several cities in Sweden. The goal of the project was to try to ease possible conflicts between parents and their children, in particular teenage daughters, through education, information and discussions. This project according to the evaluation faced a number of difficulties. One of them, was that the whole Kurdish community could not be reached due to political differences. Another obstacle was that in many cities the girls were absent from the activities arranged because of them having to stay home to look after their younger siblings or simply because of their lack of interest.

In April 2002 The Kurdish National Association released a second report about the project the *Generation Conflict*.⁴⁷ According to their evaluation, the project has successfully initiated a discussion on the dialogue between parents and their children, a delicate matter in particular regarding the daughters. Thus the project leaders find that this project has lead to a change of attitudes, although the process may be slow. Following aims with the continuation of the project are stated in the report; mapping the occurrence of generations conflict among the Kurds living in Sweden, produce and spread written information to Kurds in Sweden, establish a network consisting of people involved in the project and other organisations and authorities working with this issue, initiate a change of attitude regarding issues on equality and democracy, create a more open and liberal climate regarding the discussions on and solving of conflicts between parents and children, engage the local branches of the Kurdish National Association in the work.

Generation Conflict was initiated a couple of years before the murders of Fadime and Pela. However, the event that led to the start of this very project was the TV-program about Fadime and her family situation. The chairman was then invited to participate in debates regarding family problems, such as Fadime had with her father. Then the idea of the importance of such a project emerged.

⁴⁶ Att bygga broar mellan generationerna-en rapport om lärandet i projektet *Generationskonflikt* (To build bridges between generations- A report on educating in the project *Generationskongflikt*), Åkerlund, Pia and Hisyar Dirok; Stockholm's University, The Psychology department 2000 .

⁴⁷ *Vår röst är vår framtid. En rapport om Kurdiska riksförbundets projekt "generationskonflikt". (Our voice is our future. A report on the Kurdish National association's project "the Generation Conflict")*; The Kurdish National Association in Sweden (Kurdiska Riksförbundet), Stockholm 2002.

5.4 Kurdistan's Women Association

Kurdistan's Women Association⁴⁸ is, together with The Swedish Save the Children Fund and Uppsala municipal theatre⁴⁹, involved in a project called *Elektra*, which received a 1 million SEK grant from the government in June 2002. The aim of the project is to work with a overall picture of all problems that subject girls who live in patriarchal families can experience. The project is divided into four parts; the coordination of efforts to help and protect, support activities, a web page and a theatre tour of the play *Elektra's sisters*, that will tour in schools around the country. The project also involves education for people who are to support families that do not know much of Swedish society.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Kurdistans Kvinnoförbund

⁴⁹ Uppsala Stadsteater

⁵⁰ Press release from the Ministry of Justice dated 2002-06-19

6. The political parties role in the debate

Under this headline I will deal with both the role the murder of Fadime Sahindal has played in xenophobic propaganda. Another aspect that will be presented in this section is how her murder may be related to the Swedish mainstream parties' general election campaigns this year, as the requirements that has appeared after her death are similar to the requirements used by the major parties in their campaigning.

5.1 *The xenophobic parties' view on migrants, Islam and honour killing*

The xenophobic parties have also played a role in this debate. The **National Democrats (ND)**⁵¹ (with Neo Nazi affiliations) have for instance launched an ardent campaign against Islam in general. Also, the ND has argued that the immigrant families by themselves are xenophobic since they do not allow their daughters to have Swedish boyfriends.

In the National Democrats' Islamophobic propaganda material *Islam in Sweden – a Jihad against the Swedish Welfare State* they describe their view on Islam and women. The message is very double as it criticises Swedish politicians both for the striving to uniform gender relations and also for not daring to criticise the migrant population for treating their women badly.

The following passage is taken from this document⁵²:

»Can someone imagine the rage that would affect an ethnic Swede, that alike Muslim men, defence a view on women, whose place should be at home, and according to this the lot of the woman is to obey? Whole official Sweden, every politician down to the slightest deputy member, every journalist down to slightest summer substitute and every professional thinker down to slightest columnist, would unite to destroy that incredulous Swede that even dared to think such. But very many Muslim men in Sweden not only think so, but they both say it and exercise it in reality. Is it anyone who can hear a scrap of critics from the official Sweden?

Honour killings are deeply rooted in the Muslim view on women and an expression for the very common view among Muslims in Sweden on women as their property. Honour killings have occurred in Sweden to a great extent and for many years, according to trustworthy information (not at least from the Member of Parliament Nalin Peggul, who has a sound knowledge of the Muslim cultural pattern) but has very recently been met by attention and critics.

Fadime Sahindal, the Kurdish girl who was executed by her father for making attempts to assimilate, got her private verdict of death for among many things having a Swedish boyfriend – an unforgivable crime in the many-headed cultural circle that are represented by her father and executioner. Could someone imagine the official Swedish reaction that would cause a Swedish father that even hit her daughter for stopping her seeing migrant boys?«

It can be debated to what extent such propaganda actually influenced the society. Stieg Larsson, the director of **Expo Foundation**, in a recent seminar argued that ideologically

⁵¹ Nationaldemokraterna www.nationaldemokraterna.se

⁵² This propaganda document can be downloaded from: www.nationaldemokraterna.se

motivated racist propaganda has an influence far beyond the activities of the actual racist groups.⁵³

One interesting aspect is that in the xenophobic propaganda have used the arguments for restricting policies regarding immigration and integration coming from migrant representatives. The home page of the xenophobic periodical *Blue-Yellow Questions*⁵⁴ claim that the »politically correct« ministers do not dare to talk about differences in cultures, in comparison to the migrant representatives that talk about the cultural aspect of honour killing and raise demands on migrants.

Another home page of a xenophobic periodical, *Free Information*,⁵⁵ brings up the same aspect. Under the headline *the incomprehensible feminism*, the leader of the Left Party, Gudrun Schyman, is attacked for her provocative statement to their party congress that »Swedish men are not better than the Talibans«, i.e. the global perspective on violence against women. Curiously, *Free Information* argues that following the murder of Fadime Sahindal, Kurdish born MP Nalin Pekgul is one of the few who has given a coherent description of the honour and chastity cultures in the Middle East, e.g. in Kurdistan.

The following quote is taken from the *Free Information* home page:

*»... Where family and relatives, not at least the married women agrees on appointing a murderer to kill the woman that has disgraced the family for not wanting to marry the man the family has chosen for her«.*⁵⁶

Free information continue to maintain this opinion by comparing Pekgul to other participants in the debate whose opinion they reject, feminists like Schyman and the author Liza Marklund, or men participating in the debate like Jan Guillou and Kurdo Baksi. *Free Information* wonder why the feminists are not arguing in favour of the women but of the men. Their conclusion is as follows:

*»On the contrary what is argued is that it is not the so-called racists and xenophobes that exploit the honour killings. This is, on the other hand, made by the feminists.«*⁵⁷

On the Nazi internet site *Info-14*⁵⁸, the tragic events of the Sahindal family has been followed like a serial story. The news from 10 August 2002 notes that the brother, Mesut Sahindal, has been detained due to suspicion of participating in a gang rape. Here follows a quotation from the end of the article:

»The Kurdish family Sahindal have in other words been a tormentor since they came. Naturally the Swedish honour must be restored after the ravages of the Sahindal clan, thus the evil must be pulled up by the roots and the Sahindal family will be deported damned quick.«

⁵³ Seminar for TUC integration policy groups, Borås, September 27, 2002.

⁵⁴ Blå-gula Frågor. The article is available at <http://www.bgf.nu/korrekt/kmin.html>

⁵⁵ *Fri information*.

⁵⁶ <http://www.friinformation.com/102/Den%20obegripliga%20feminismen.htm>

⁵⁷ <http://www.friinformation.com/102/Den%20obegripliga%20feminismen.htm>

⁵⁸ www.info14.com

A great amount of letters to the editor regarding the murder of Fadime Sahindal were published in the daily press. One of them is taken from the newspaper *Expressen*⁵⁹:

»People escape from troubled war-torn countries to give their children a future in our safe country. Then they should not kill their own children.« MB

Another interesting Letter to the editor from the same day and same newspaper focus on the importance of teaching newly arrived people that honour crimes are unacceptable in Sweden and at an early stage inform parents about the possibilities that their daughters might fall in love with Swedish men. Other contributions to the debate have been more aggressive and want to deport the migrants who do not want to assimilate and follow Swedish legislation.

5.2 The role integration has played in Swedish politics after the murder of Fadime Sahindal

The talk of improved integration, mainly concerning migrants' better knowledge on what values that are prevailing in the Swedish society, has been increased after the murder of Fadime Sahindal.

This has been expressed in for instance increased demands on the introduction of tests, mostly regarding language skills but also regarding values, to become a Swedish citizen.

In an article approximately six months prior to the murder of Fadime Sahindal, minister of Integration Mona Sahlin argued:

»In Sweden it is some values that you can either like or dislike, but they are prevailing here. I do not tolerate racists or homophobes, and I do not tolerate that multiculturalism is used as an argument for subjecting girls.«⁶⁰

Two months after the murder, the Conservative MP Jeppe Johnsson proposed to the Swedish Parliament that certain language skills should be demanded when granting citizenship. He also wanted to introduce demands on knowledge of how Swedish society works.⁶¹

These suggestions on demands were revived in the major political parties' election campaigns before the general election held on 15 September. The mainstream Liberal party launched its integration plan only a couple of weeks before the general election; one of the suggestions – both applauded and heavily criticised – demanded the introduction of language tests before granting Swedish citizenship. Critics accused the Liberal Party of playing with xenophobic and populist sentiments.

As a matter of fact the Liberal Party experienced a landslide success in election. They reached an election result on 13,3 percent of the voters compared to 4,7 percent in the 1998 election, although the Socialist bloc, (the Social Democrats together with the Left Party and the Green Party), remain in power. The success of the Liberal Party was to a great extent attributed to their introduction of the integration issue in debate. The Liberal Party has countered by claiming that the issue was not proposed for the benefit of the election campaign, but has been in the making for several years.

⁵⁹ *Expressen*, 24 January 2002.

⁶⁰ *Expressen*, 22 August 2001.

⁶¹ *Göteborgs-Posten*, 6 April 2002.

6. Analysis

Fadime Sahindal has indeed become a »martyr« of our time. Everyone has heard of her and her fate, even abroad, and almost every group and institution involved in gender issues, integration politics, legislation and related areas, has one way or another participated in the debate or been forced to formulate a position on her fate.

It should be noted that not one single group or individual participating in the debate has in any way condoned or expressed support for honour killings. The debate has entirely focused on issues of »why«, »who is responsible«, and »how should the system of honour killings be combated«.

Speaking from a personal point of view, as a Swedish woman of Kurdish descent, I am often asked by people who seldom or never encounter migrants and in particular Kurds, if I know other Kurdish girls in a situation similar to Fadime. On such questions I usually answer that although I have lived in a Kurdish environment, the single woman I have ever met with such a dramatic and life-threatening problem is Fadime Sahindal. I can say that I have hardly met her at all, only for a couple of minutes at her last public appearance.

I am well aware of that there are many girls living under the same circumstances, as well as that there are girls of Swedish origin that are subject to male violence in their homes. The starting-point for this analysis is not the actual crime but the responsibility of media and authorities.

6.1 Media's role

The first failure of media that I have found, is that Media in general has missed all the other girls of Middle Eastern origin who are not threatened and who don't live in a situation where they have to face violence or threats from fathers, brothers or other male relatives. Media's coverage is black and white and leaves the reader with an impression that if you are a woman of Middle East origin you must be oppressed, threatened and subjected to violence. This is a dangerous role play which inadvertently may encourage prejudicial propaganda of xenophobic groups and create a false image of »Islamic people« being in a certain way. In reality the overall picture is much more complex than it presented in the pages of media.

This criticism is not new. In a student's thesis from 1998 Kristina Berggren and Malin Lindblad show how media chooses to portray migrant women and girls as primarily victims.⁶² This pattern has increased after these two honour killings on Kurdish girls living in Sweden. Media has chosen to act »on behalf« of the migrant girls that are living under subjection from male relatives. Nor does media in general seem to have any intention to widen the horizon to describe migrant girls and women in broader perspective. Although there have been many interviews with young women not subjected to any violence or threats in the last six months, mainly of Kurdish origin, these young women are described as strong, successful and above all well integrated into Swedish society. The articles have nevertheless rarely focused on their success, but rather on the honour issue.

⁶² *Bilden av "den andra"- "invandrarkvinnan i svensk dagspress 970701-980630. (The picture of "the other"- "the migrant woman" in Swedish daily press 01-07-97 - 30-06-98)*, Berggren, Kristina and Malin Lindblad, Gothenburg University, the department for peace and conflict research, November 1998.

In this lies the problem – being integrated or not – the duality that migrant women cannot escape. Young women of Kurdish or Middle East origin have been invited to television sofas in various debates and have been interviewed in numerous media, only with the purpose of describing the situation of their less fortunate sisters of the same ethnic origin. In media they are used as »representatives«, but the girls that appear are in most cases highly educated, strong (in a European sense, i.e. no veils), and very go-ahead.

As such, the girls that have found a platform are the opposite to the subject girls of Middle East descent that are the focus of the debate. The picture that media presents implies girls wearing veils, girls being forced to early marriages, girls being circumcised and girls subjected to honour related crimes. The viewers only hear about these girls but very seldom meet them, but it is the image of them that survives not the image of the strong migrant women that are their representatives.

When examining the media flow regarding honour related crimes it should be noted that if the subject matter is – veil carrying Muslim girls from patriarchal families – have been conspicuous by their absence, this also regards the major Muslim organisations, although they have not been totally absent from the debate. However, as a result of this the main participants in the debate are thus anti-Islamite in their approach.

The majority of the articles and programs in media that have focused on patriarchal violence are generally lacking all other kind of violence girls can be subjected to regardless of ethnic origin. The only focus has been on honour killings, thereby creating a new, specific murder category and by doing so, implying it may be or should be viewed differently from other murders or other violence against women.

To a certain extent it can be argued that this is a self-generating system where the participants in the debate are acting according to a predetermined script on how migrants should be discussed in Swedish society. Everyone is following the rules, thus maintaining the a picture of »them and us«. Us – the Swedes – versus them – the foreigners. This is not intended to be malicious, rather the contrary; it is to help people to integrate into Swedish society. At the same time two stereotype role models for subject girls is being formed; one idealizing the strong and educated migrant girl who want to become Swedish – that is »good« – and one who is not conforming by still carrying a veil – that is »bad«, or at least a problem.

At the same time it should be noted that the media response has been beneficial in that respect that for the first time an issue which previously has only concerned small activist groups or the subject girls themselves, has suddenly become an issue for the entire nation as such. The media coverage has focused on a very real problem.

6.2 The »cultural« debate

In the debate on whether honour killings are cultural or not, there has not been any entirely good explanations presented for what underlying factors there may be. Everyone has spoken their own view on murders related to violence against women either it may depend on culture or not. The public may listen to the debate on the cultural dimension, but it may also be difficult to people not initiated. This debate on whether culture is an underlying factor or not may thus only attract other intellectuals.

I have found numerous inconsistencies in the contributors' arguments, at one moment calling for restrictions (or at least a selection) on migration (e.g. lawyer Elisabeth Fritz, but also Dilsa Demirbag), while at another moment calling for the withdrawal of such restrictions by advocating more lenient views.

It may be easier for the public to listen to the representatives of the migrant girls and in this case it is all the women with migrant background that have expressed their views, for instance MP Nalin Pekgul and other women who participated in television and contributed with chronicles on the subject. They are also the ones that are used as good examples in xenophobic propaganda against the »cowardly« Swedish establishment, including leftist intellectuals and Kurdish men, who do not dare to take stands because of fear to sounding xenophobic. The migrant women in the debate are good representatives for subject girls in the xenophobes' eyes, as they are women of that origin themselves.

6.3 Values and demands

The establishing of new associations working against men's oppression of women may be seen from different perspectives. A group of Kurdish men established the organisation **Kurdish men against oppression of women**. This initiative may be seen as a response and that this group of Kurdish men want to show the establishment that they take this violence that has occurred within their community seriously. They are in one way showing that they are aware that many of them share these views, but are willing to change, to become more Swedish, e.g. to become »good men«, and to follow society's requirements to integrate.

This may be cynical, but seen from this perspective many of the measures taken by NGO's and the authorities can be analysed out of this perspective. For instance, in articles the responsible men behind **Save the Children's Fund's** project for men, the *Dialogue project*, specifically states that men coming to Sweden has to conform to Swedish standards, to the Swedish men's role. Even though they only say it in one sentence, they express themselves like that. We versus them. The intentions are good, but the argument rests on the perception that one culture equals »bad non-Swedish values«, and the purpose is to gain »better, more Swedish« values.

It is also interesting to see how men and women react differently in the debate. The majority of the women, the representatives of the ethnic groups, are more aggressive in their approach towards the Swedish authorities and the male dominance within their own communities. They are requiring more of society, to take these issues more seriously, but also within their own ethnic groups.

Demands often come in the form of advocating harsher punishments for men killing or threatening their daughters. They are also the ones who want to make it more difficult for people to become citizens and in some cases even want society to be able to withdraw a citizenship if a person commits crimes, such as honour killing.

Sometimes there seem to be a lack of consistency in the demands that are emerging in the debate. However, those advocating stricter demands on migrants, (in particular when such demands are made by migrants), are given larger credit among the xenophobic groups, that are of course using such arguments for their own purposes.

The Kurdish men who have participated in the debate do not to the same extent want to increase the requirements on the migrant population. They are not as militant and anti-Islamite in their approach. It may be because of the fact that men in the debate are used by media for different purposes than women. Women may be engaged to talk about the frequent occurrence of this tradition, since they are the subjects, while men are invited to talk about the bad reputation this group may experience. They are thus used more to explain or make excuses for this behaviour, which in this way may look like an attitude towards the cultural explanation, even if this is not clearly expressed.

6.4 Projects and counter measures

There is a certain pattern visible concerning the projects that have been initiated. The majority of the projects are working with changing attitudes and values and giving education on rights and obligations among the target group, parents, men and boys of Middle East origin. This can be because the men are the one's who in the eyes of Swedish society constitute a threat to the girls in their group.

Most projects in this area are state financed. To be granted the applicants have to follow a certain model and certain fixed ideas regarding target groups and measures. Most often there are certain main areas where you rather easily can be granted money. The authorities are deciding what area that is in priority. Evidently, as the debate on subject girls of foreign origin recently has attracted a great amount of attention, in particular from media and this area has become a priority. Thus, the engagement of media and what kind of angles of approach media is choosing can be said to be of great importance for how authorities act in certain matter, for instance the honour related crimes. Media is in this way again setting the agenda.

Regarding the choice on what to call the target group of measures suggested, interestingly enough there is some disagreement and confusion. This may be because honour killing is of a delicate nature, is it cultural or not cultural. The Swedish Government, has taken a clear stand here, when choosing to call the girls in question, »*subject girls from patriarchal families*«, thus choosing to see the oppression as something of basic cultural nature.

In the 2000 report *Let us talk about girls*, the Integration Board called their target group »*girls with other ethnic and cultural background than the majority of the Swedish population*«.

When mapping the situation of this group of the Swedish population they wanted to give an overall picture which would not problemize the situation. This wording regarding what to call the girls was however taken from the governments' commission to the Board to map the situation for these girls. The **Swedish Save the Children Fund** has in their survival handbook chosen the wording »*girls in double cultures*«. Living in double cultures can both be positive and negative, you can either choose the best from both cultures or you can end up between of a different set of values, which may be difficult.

Even though there has been a strong debate regarding migrant girls and the occurrence of honour related crimes I have found a pattern. That is the fear of how to relate to delicate matters like these. There is a strong fear of sounding too xenophobic, in particular among the politicians, authorities and the participants in the public debate. This is understandable as it is very difficult to explain why phenomena's like these occur.

There also seem to be a strong fear for acting too lenient, since that would imply that all citizens would not necessarily have the same freedom and rights and, even worse, that you might be accused of trying to excuse honour killings or even covertly endorsing such actions.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

»Honour killings« is not an easy phenomenon to deal with. It is very difficult to explain and impossible to excuse, whatever the underlying social, cultural, and economical or other causes may be. One of the headlines I have seen during the six months that followed Fadime Sahindal's death, that best explains the »honour killing« is; *»a murder is a murder is a murder«*.

There is also there I find that this debate in a way has failed. It is a murder and it should be treated as such.

This confusion on how to label a crime has to be brought into the discussion, as there are many young girls that are subject in one form or another to violence in Sweden. There is a great number of hidden statistics. But among the flood of articles and television programs on crimes, very few in Sweden actually concern murder. The two murders of Fadime Sahindal and Pela Atroshi were both committed by migrants from Middle Eastern countries. Both were of Kurdish origin. This coincidence and the fact that murder is still a relatively unusual crime in Sweden may be the reason for the enormous impact these two killings have had on Swedish media and society as a whole. This may also be the reason why it is so difficult to give a good explanation for and to understand the phenomena as such.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the two murders by themselves are completely different from each other and have different motives and underlying factors. Any simple or convenient explanation for »honour killings« therefore meets certain logical difficulties already when these two murders are examined. These crimes fall into the category of crimes that the majority of the Swedish population totally reject as incomprehensible, e.g. murder of one's child.

This control over women's sexuality is in most Swedes' eyes intolerable and non-intelligible. Although it may be said that it is a rather new approach for Swedes as well, as the Swedish notion of women's sexuality has changed radically only in the last thirty–forty years. That the people who have migrated to Sweden do not understand the prevailing view on women's sexuality may not be that easy to grasp, nor that the Swedish comprehension about prevailing notions among migrants.

I have found a good explanation for this non-comprehension, namely the historian Kenneth Fritzén working with integration issues in Uppsala, Fadime Sahindal's hometown. According to him the most difficult things to meet and to grasp in a new culture is what he calls the »hub of a culture«, i.e. issues regarding family, child care and up-bringing, gender, sexuality and nudity and the way of solving conflicts.⁶³ Kenneth Ritzén finds that these are the issues the majority in a society is most intolerant about. On an individual level it is these points that we are the least inclined to understand and to change our attitudes about.

⁶³ *Medias ansvar i mångfaldsfrågor*” (The responsibility of media in diversity issues) Cecilia Englund in *Röster och Möten i Mångfalden (Voices and Meetings in the Plurality)*, Skriftserie 2001:1, Stockholm, 2001, p. 126.

This theory can never explain the occurrence of a murder on whatever grounds. It can however explain why it is so difficult to understand each other when it comes to matters that are self evident for some people, but for others not.

It is not an easy thing to recommend measures regarding this issue. One recommendation towards better measures, as for increased understanding of each other regarding the matter of family, up-bringing, gender and sexuality, and also decrease segregation in Swedish society, may be better collaboration between the migrants' organisations and the authorities.

One recommendation regards the media's way of illuminating multicultural issues. Media presentation of for example migrants and in particular Muslims or Muslim women has to become more balanced.

This may be done through improved education of journalists and students of journalism. An increased diversity among the staff at media institutions may also be of importance.

Also there has to be more institutions that scrutinize media. One such organisation already existing, the Red Cross Youth Organisation's Quick Response. Their work is very important and should be encouraged and supported.

Finally – on the same day as this report is finished, the news reports that the migrant magazine *Sesam* is closed down due to problems of funding. *Sesam* has existed for many years, always in the red margin of tough economy. At the same time this has been one of the few – if not the single broader migrant weekly in Sweden. This voice is now closed.

As long as the mainstream media does not live up to its responsibility of diversity it is extremely important that Sweden has migrant newspapers and magazines, produced by migrants and for migrants, that focus on multicultural and related issues. Today it is very difficult to get state funding for such magazines and many papers are shut down after only one or two issues due to difficulties with funding.

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